

The 1919 Stanley Cup Finals

Seattle hockey fans were looking forward to the 1919 Stanley Cup Finals. The hometown Metropolitans were coming off of a solid second place finish and a playoff series win over Vancouver, earning the right to host the Montreal Canadiens in a rematch of the 1917 finals. As the fans filed into the Arena on March 19 expectations were high for a good, competitive series. Little did anyone know what an incredible physical toll the series would take on the players over the upcoming 12 days, culminating with the unfortunate death of Joe Hall of the Canadiens.

The series started innocently enough as the Mets took advantage of a tired Montreal squad that had just arrived in town, winning the opener by a score of 7-0. Muzz Murray of the Mets was injured by a slash and had to leave the game, the first of a number of injuries that plagued both clubs. He was forced to miss the second game as well, and with Bobby Rowe also hurt the Mets had to play the entire second game with only seven players. Montreal took advantage of the situation and evened the series with a 4-2 win.

In the third game it was Montreal that suffered physically, losing defenseman Bert Corbeau with a badly injured shoulder. A 7-2 win gave Seattle a two games to one advantage in the best-of-five series, and the fans were hoping the local club would clinch the Cup in the next meeting.

The fourth game of the series has gone down in history as one of the all-time classic Stanley Cup match-ups. Players on both sides played with injuries and were worn down from the physical series. The Mets had a goal waived off at the end of the first period because the puck entered the goal after time expired. That turned out to be a pivotal call, as the teams battled through three scoreless periods before going into overtime. Bobby Rowe, who sat out all of regulation with a severe ankle injury, took to the ice in overtime as a substitute, putting all of his weight on only one leg. After 20 minutes of overtime the game was ruled a tie, and the efforts by both teams were wasted.

By the fifth game, both teams were exhausted. The Mets had four skaters playing with significant injuries, and the Canadiens weren't in much better shape. Both Cully Wilson of the Mets and Joe Hall of Montreal collapsed during the course of the game and had to be carried from the ice and taken to a local hospital. Back at the Arena, the Canadiens rallied from a 3-0 deficit to come away with a 4-3 overtime win, forcing a fifth (technically a sixth) and deciding game in the series.

Unfortunately that game never took place. The physical toll of the series left the players susceptible to the Spanish Flu epidemic that was sweeping North America, and by April 1 five of the Canadiens were hospitalized by the virus. A number of Seattle skaters were also laid up with the illness, and the city health department called off the series. While most of the players eventually recovered, Joe Hall succumbed and passed away on April 5.

The series was ruled a tie by PCHA President Frank Patrick and the Stanley Cup was not awarded in 1919. In the 85 years since the 1919 series the Stanley Cup has always been awarded to the top professional hockey team in North America, though that run appears to be in jeopardy given the current labor strife in the NHL.

Jeff Obermeyer is a 13-year season ticket holder with the Thunderbirds. His new book, "Hockey in Seattle", chronicles the history of hockey in Seattle from 1915 to the present day. It is available at the souvenir stands or through his website at <http://www.seattlehockey.net>.